

Civitan Club for being awarded the 2019–2021 Highest Percentage Increase Award by Civitan International.

Founded in 1938, the Loris Civitan Club is one of 1,300 Civitan Clubs with over 40,000 members worldwide. It is the oldest civic organization in the city of Loris, South Carolina and has provided invaluable services for the people there since its inception.

The club supports the Loris community by working with the local school system, supporting organizations that serve children with disabilities, providing programs at local football games, and setting out American flags on federal holidays.

Additionally, the Loris Civitan Club has played a large part in sponsoring the annual South Carolina Special Olympic Games. I believe it is important for the country to continue growing civic organizations like the Loris Civitan Club. They work hard every day to ensure that those with mental disabilities and the less fortunate in the Loris community have the assistance they need to live a fulfilling life. The members associated with this club are shining examples of true American patriots and amazing role models for the Loris community and the state of South Carolina.

Madam Speaker, I join the people of Loris in congratulating the Loris Civitan Club on their momentous achievement. We thank them for the selfless actions they have taken to improve the Loris community.

RECOGNIZING ERICA ALFARO AS CONSTITUENT OF THE MONTH

HON. MIKE LEVIN

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 12, 2021

Mr. LEVIN of California. Madam Speaker, it is my great honor to recognize an inspiring motivational speaker and first-generation American in my community, Erica Alfaro, as my September Constituent of the Month. Erica was born in Fresno, California, and spent much of her childhood in Tijuana. Her mother, Teresa, a farm worker, and her father, Claudio, a landscaper, moved the family to Oceanside when Erica was 13 to provide Erica with educational opportunities that were never available to them.

Upon arrival in Oceanside, Erica and her family moved into a two-bedroom apartment with another family, where a total of 11 people shared the small space. Erica recalls accompanying her mother to the fields and listening to her mother describe education as a means to achieve a better life.

After becoming a mother herself at 15 years old and dropping out of high school, Erica would eventually receive her high school diploma through a home school program and enroll in classes at MiraCosta College. During this time, Erica balanced an extremely heavy workload that included a full-time job, full-time coursework, and full-time motherhood. When her son was diagnosed with cerebral palsy, Erica's grades began to slide, forcing her to temporarily suspend her academic dreams. Through this all, Erica persisted.

Determined to complete the education her parents desperately desired for her, Erica would eventually receive an associate's degree from MiraCosta College, a bachelor's de-

gree from California State University San Marcos, and a master's degree from San Diego State University.

Erica has endured hardship and inspired hope, and she stands today as a model of perseverance. Her story has touched people from all walks of life, and she continues to motivate others as an in-demand motivational speaker. In addition to her speaking engagements—and her ongoing role as a devoted mother—Erica currently works in the Human Resources Department of the West Coast Tomato Growers in Oceanside, where she in forms farmworkers of their rights. In celebration of Erica's achievements and Hispanic Heritage Month, I'm proud to honor Erica Alfaro as my September Constituent of the Month.

CONGRESSIONAL VETERAN COM- MENDATION FOR SERGEANT JIM M. YEONOPOLUS

HON. JOHN R. CARTER

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 12, 2021

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Madam Speaker, I am honored to present Sergeant Jim M. Yeonopolus, U.S. Air Force with a Congressional Veteran Commendation. Throughout his life, he has been a shining example of the best of public service.

Sgt. Yeonopolus enlisted in the Air Force in 1968. He selflessly volunteered to serve with the South Vietnamese Army during the Vietnam War and provided them with vital resources, all while serving as a ground/airborne radio operator. He continued to distinguish himself through his actions, including close air support during the infamous Shoemaker Campaign. At every step along the way, Sgt. Yeonopolus used his bravery and commitment to the mission to save both American and South Vietnamese lives.

Following his military retirement, Sgt. Yeonopolus served in numerous state and national leadership roles in organizations devoted to veterans, students, young leaders, and local economic development. His commitment to investing his talents and abilities to improve his beloved community is highly admirable and proves him to be an exemplary citizen. His resume tells the story of a man unafraid to contribute both his time and energies to a multitude of organizations that rely on volunteerism and social engagement to make good communities great.

I proudly join Sgt. Yeonopolus' friends, family, and colleagues in saluting his selfless service to the Air Force and Texas. His positive impacts on his community and fellow man will be felt for generations.

HONORING MRS. VELMA BENSON WILSON

HON. BENNIE G. THOMPSON

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 12, 2021

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor Mrs. Velma Benson Wilson.

Velma was born and raised in Marks, Mississippi. She is the fifth of seventeen children and spent her early childhood on a small rural farm, where her parents taught her the value of hard work, family, and the importance of getting a good education.

Wilson graduated from Quitman County High School as the class valedictorian, and was awarded a full academic scholarship to St. Norbert College in DePere, Wisconsin, where she received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology and Education in 1973.

Wilson is currently employed by the Quitman County Board of Supervisors as the first Quitman County Economic & Tourism Director. She has been in this position for one year and has made significant achievements by establishing a 501(3) (c) for the county to help generate additional funding resources outside the realms of state and national grant funds. A new Quitman County Economic & Tourism website has been developed to market to potential businesses and industry, to seek economic opportunities. Wilson has successfully opened the Quitman County Interpretive Welcome Center, which serves as a multi-purpose building—offering lounge space and restrooms for waiters and riders for the Amtrak trains that stop twice daily in Marks, a tourism gift shop and office and public meeting spaces.

Wilson was instrumental in working with the Mississippi State Legislative, the Board of Supervisors, and the City of Marks Board of Aldermen to obtain state bond funding of \$200,000, to assist with the renovation of the county full-service grocery store, which officially closed in 2017, making Quitman County a food desert. Additionally, a grant was submitted and funded for \$200,000, with a USDA American Healthy Financial Food Initiative, which allowed the purchase of new refrigeration equipment for the grocery store. In April 2021, this store was successful re-opening bringing back 30 loss jobs to the community.

In 2016, Wilson was employed as the first African American, and the first female County Administrator for the Quitman County Board of Supervisors. She served in this position for 5 years prior to transitioning to the Director of Economic Development and Tourism. Within her five year tenure, as County Administrator, she helped secured over \$4 million in local, regional, state and federal funds for projects that benefitted Quitman County.

One of Wilson's most momentous achievements, as County Administrator was coordinating negotiations with federal, state, and local elected officials, as well as regional stakeholders in an agreement with Canadian National Railroad and Amtrak to allow the construction of an Amtrak station in Marks, MS. The Amtrak station opened May 4, 2018.

Wilson's previous career, prior to returning to her hometown, included a co-business owner (15 years) multi-auto franchises (Buick, GMC, Dodge, Chrysler and Hyundai) in Jackson, TN. And she spent (12 years) as a social worker and educator.

She is also an author. Her book, *What's in the Water*, was the winner of 2013 Daughter of American Revolution Print Media Award. This book also gave her the distinction of being named as one of the twenty most influential women in West Tennessee for civic, business and community contributions. As a writer, Wilson was an Oprah's Magazine Contributor for the October and November 2013